

A Sermon for DaySpring

By Burt L. Burleson

“You Better Watch Out”

Luke 21: 25-34

December 3, 2006

“**Anguish... perplexity???? People fainting from terror????**” Doesn’t exactly go with *Chestnuts roasting on an open fire*, now does it?

Can you imagine Bing singing this? *I’m dreaming of an apocalyptic nightmare... Just like the ones we used to know. Where the sea is raging and nations waging... those wars, that make our cities glow.*

We’re supposed to be having hot chocolate...

Going to parties...

And watching *It’s a Wonderful Life* for goodness sakes.

... And here Jesus is talking like Ebenezer Scrooge. What in the world are we doing reading this on the first Sunday of Advent?

It happens every year, you know... Before we hear Gabriel announcing to Mary and before we get to hear angels singing to shepherds... we have to stop first at one of these texts where Jesus seems to be saying, “**Things are going to get worse before they get better.**”

Maybe it’s so we can get in the first century sandals of those who were waiting on God. Maybe it’s so we can remember what’s it’s like to be looking for God to make things right when everything seems wrong. It’s what they knew in the first century and what we know in any age...

That the world isn’t right...

It’s always in turmoil... and turmoil at so many levels...

The earth and nations and families quaking...

Stars and lives falling...

Jerusalem and your mind under siege...

It’s no wonder folks throughout time read a text like this one and said, “**Well, he’s talking to us for sure...**” All it takes is a natural disaster... a dictator or two. A kingdom declaring war or bankruptcy... throw in a recession, a little petulance, and you’ve got the makings of a best-selling book.

Everyone always thinks this time is about their time... and you know what???? I think they’re right. It is... because the world... the cosmos is always reflecting and reacting to what is going on... in us and in God.

Everything’s connected... everything’s significant. Nothing can splash in any pond without rippling. The UN... the stars... Wall Street... your street, your family... your heart. The splash your life makes washes up on shores you may never see. Love here or hate there changes things... for sure.

Your choices matter...

Our decisions as a community matter...

And as a nation...

As a church...

And I don’t just mean by that... politically or socially or culturally. Everything reacts to everything. I don’t think Jesus is merely talking metaphorically. Mess up enough hearts and lives and the creation suffers.

Paul says, **that the creation is groaning for us to grow up.** And if the cosmos reacts and responds to us... how much more to God. When God has so much as a thought... something changes in the world. If God sneezes... look out.

Jesus says, **when you see the world shaking and baking then you should look around because God is up to something.**

And there are some very important ideas for us here.

First of all, understand that when God gets busy, it's about the world and not just about you. It's about the world and everything in it. The cosmos, the creation, everyone and everything is what God is interested in. Not just your heart and your pass through the pearly gates.

God is saving the world.

The Advent of God is about the world.

Everything's being redeemed...

Not just your soul.

Fred Craddock in his commentary on this passage writes, **“The human heart is too small a screen on which to cast that grand scene. For all that Christian faith means to each individual who embraces it, the church cannot continue to permit, much less endorse, a subjective captivity of the gospel. Not even the community of faith is adequate as the arena of Christ's saving work. The whole of creation stands at the window eagerly awaiting the arrival of redemption for the children of God.”**

The first or the second coming of Christ is not just about you or just for us... it's for the sake of all things. We've seen a great light and it's for all the world. All things being put right again.

And so when God begins to work... all things react. And when God gets creative it seems it's always associated with chaos and that's true in our text... and others.

Remember in Genesis... Creation is spoken into being over what is chaotic. Chaos makes room for the creative.

When things start to disintegrate,
wherever and whenever...

Jesus says, we ought to pay special attention to that...

Look up... don't go run and hide... look up. Your redemption is at hand. It's coming out from the chaos of things.

See... that's sort of backwards because our instincts are to run and hide... you know, fight or flight. Duck... or brace yourself...

Jesus wants to develop a different instinct in his followers. **“Lift up your heads.”** Which means look and look with anticipation. Disintegration and chaos and trouble and even death... make room for God to do something new.

Don't flinch when the world and your world seem to be unraveling... look up.

“It's just like new leaves in the Springtime,” Jesus says, **“When you see them you know summer is on its way.”** See... there is a rhythm to God's time as well... there's a pattern, disintegration and reintegration, life and death and life... chaos and creativity. And eyes of faith never simply see chaos and then shut in despair. They'll look up and around because they know some creative act of God is on the way.

That's the instinct Jesus wants us to develop... a soul-jerk reaction to look for Divine activity.

So Jesus says, **“if seeing and perceiving is the deal... be careful, or your hearts will be weighted down with dissipation, drunkenness, and the anxieties of life.”**

These are important words... Jesus isn't just talking off-the-cuff here, just sort of using that preacher *preachese* and talking in triplicate... He's giving us spiritual wisdom, particular spiritual teaching.

The heart is an organ of perception... not at least in the biblical use of the word, simply a place of sentiment; as in, **“that really touched my heart.”** The heart is a faculty at the center of who we are and it has the capacity, among other things, to perceive spiritual things.

So, Jesus is trying to give us some practical teaching to go along with all this heavy, foreboding, apocalyptic bah-humbug. **“Keep the heart light. Don’t let it get weighted down... take care that it does not get heavy.”**

And the guidance he gives is particular...

Don’t let it get weighted down by dissipation. In other words... there is a spiritual energy within us and if we’re not careful and mindful it can be drained away. ... Dissipated!

So... you come here, perhaps... feel your spirit lifted, the heart lighter... and if you’re paying attention, you’ll notice a different quality of energy and that’s real, by the way. You’ll feel it in your body and mind and in relationships.

Don’t let it dissipate. And there are ways that happens.

Too much talking, for instance, dissipates spirit. Talk about anything, including and maybe especially God. There’s a reason the ancient Israelites were not to mention the name of God aloud. Talk dissipates energy of the heart... Open the mouth too much and it’s like steam going out of the steam bath.

And there are other things...

Critique... finer energy of spirit will wane if we’re busy judging and condemning self and others.

Passive imaginations... just daydreaming of something else or someplace else or someone else, rather than being present to this moment. Give into that and you’ll feel the heart get cold and heavy.

“Keep it light,” Jesus would say. Don’t let it get heavy with drunkenness... and this is very practical teaching. Anything that we enjoy too much will dull us.

Too much scotch or wine.

Too much Bushes or Bluebell.

Too much work or entertainment...

TV... IPOD... Internet...

People... shopping... Too much anything.

It dulls the spirit and the heart gets heavy. Pay attention to your energy... you know this is true. When the heart gets heavy it cannot perceive and the chaos outside of you, will only create chaos within you.

And the anxieties of life certainly will. That’s why Jesus puts that on the list. And it’s so important to pay careful attention to his words... **“Don’t be weighted down by them.”**

You’ll feel them... if you’re human. Your son will be driving 12 hours home from Missouri, for instance. His first long road trip alone and, if your human, you’ll feel some anxiety but if you’re listening to Jesus you won’t let it weigh you down.

You know the bills have to be paid but Jesus will say to you, **“your worry isn’t going to change a thing... and it’s only going to weigh your heart down.”**

You’ll be mindful that you’re going home for the holidays and you know sometimes how that can be... You’ll remember last year, the way your uncle behaved... so predictable, as was your mom’s reaction. But your anxiety isn’t going to change that... Your worry has no control over folks.

And if you let it weigh the heart down your heart can’t function and you’ll miss the coming of God and the **chaos will be more like a trap for you,** Jesus says.

So... there’s work for you to do this season... if you want to experience the Advent of God. Be careful with your heart... It’s like God has given you a very delicate piece of equipment and it says on the side, **“handle with care.”**

You can’t treat this, just however and expect it to function... don’t let it be weighted down by dissipation, drunkenness, and anxiety... there’s so much to see... too much to see that you need to see so that you can be in on it... What God is doing.

“**We’ve seen a great light**” and we’ve been invited to reflect it to the world. Redemption is at hand and we start this season being reminded that it wasn’t just at hand in the first century... but now as well.

Maybe that’s why we have to read this hard stuff first... so we can remember it’s happening now. God is redeeming now and we can be in on it... or not.

It’ll help us to have been reminded about the end. History is going someplace and so are every one of our lives... and to take a peak at that should change the way we live. Jesus does the apocalyptic, unveiling thing... and we see that it’s not going to last forever.

It changes you to begin at the end.

The monastic used to say often, “**remember your death... everyday... remember your death.**” About once a month they’d all parade through the chapel in black as if they were going to their own funeral.

Of course, all the old cathedrals were built on top of the bones of the Saints and martyrs. The foundation they walked on reminded them that they had an appointment with death... this existence isn’t forever.

And what about our own history. If you go to the East coast and look at the churches built several hundred years ago, where’s the cemetery? Right beside it... You can’t go inside without being reminded that your life is headed there.

Maybe that’s why the Church insists we read these hard words first every year before we move towards the joy of the Christmas story. Before we start humming *Away in a Manger*... We should join Jesus in singing, *You Better Watch Out*.

There is an end coming... and as someone said at Lectionary if I’m mindful of that in the morning it’ll give me a sense of urgency about the day. “I have to live with the end in sight.” (Bobby Kluck)

Would you do this season differently if you knew that your own end was, say, January 15th? I would... If I knew that time was short and redemption at hand.

What gifts would I give?

How many fires would I take the time to make and sit by?

What would I give away? Who would I bless?

How would the wassail taste?

Would I worry or love?

Let us, by this unveiling, chose love. And by this unveiling, may we be awakened... be awakened to what God would give us this day? And all God would call us to this day? And all we might do and be this season together. Amen.

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